

## Opinion

## Why it's hard to get in the spirit of Juneteenth in 2025

Four short years after the recognition of a holiday commemorating freedom, it feels like Black people are less free.



— In 2021, after years of tireless advocacy by Opal Lee, President Joe Biden signed the bill establishing June 19 as Juneteenth in federal law. Tilde Oyster / NBC News

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**By Donney Rose, poet, advocacy journalist and teaching artist**

I was a student at [Southern University](#), a historically Black university, when I learned the truth about Juneteenth and its correlation with our freedom. I may have heard of Juneteenth before then, but I couldn't have told you that it fell on June 19 or that it celebrated the day after the Civil

War when enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, learned they were free. I learned the truth because of the Afrocentric brothers and sisters on campus who more or less demanded that their schoolmates “do the knowledge” about our history.

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## Juneteenth was never mentioned in any of my K-12 social studies or history lessons.

Though I grew up less than 300 miles east of Galveston in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Juneteenth was never mentioned in any of my K-12 social studies or history lessons. Those in control of what we learned – governors, state superintendents, district superintendents – seemed indifferent about our knowing that bit of history.

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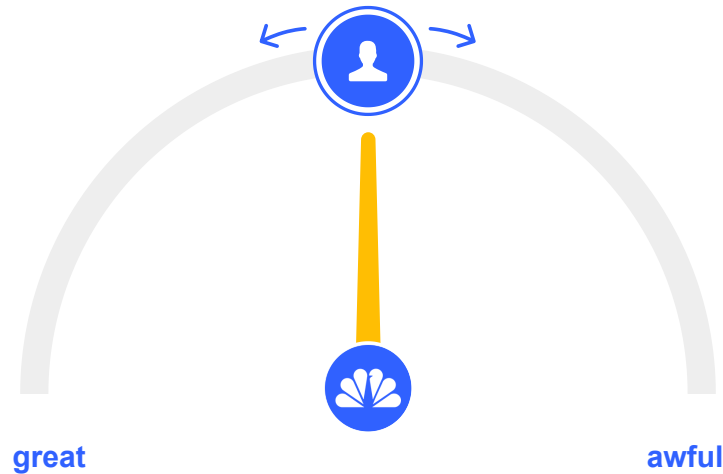
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We all know about Juneteenth now. In 2021, after years of tireless advocacy by Opal Lee, then a 94-year-old Black retired schoolteacher who had previously walked 1,400 miles from Texas to Washington, D.C., to demand a federal holiday, President Joe Biden signed the bill establishing that federal holiday into law. So why, just four short years after the recognition of a holiday commemorating freedom, does it feel like Black people are less free?

## Donald Trump's anti-DEI push is likely to prove \_\_\_\_\_ for racial relations.



**MSNBC**

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A big reason is that President Donald Trump seems to be doing everything he can to eliminate any semblance of diversity, equity and inclusion. He has **removed, and seemed to target, Black leaders** who occupied **prominent positions** in government, appointed **new leaders** who have expressed open hostility around matters of voting rights and civil rights, promised to change the names of **military bases** back to honor treasonous Confederate figures and, more than once, **removed the names of icons** of Black history from some government websites because their roles as Black historical figures were being acknowledged.

On top of all that comes Trump's **specific threat** to deprive schools that teach curricula that are *diverse* in their *inclusion* of historical figures and events that aren't white-centered of federal funding. This increases the likelihood of Juneteenth's once again becoming a footnote in American classrooms. Because how can a teacher properly explain what Juneteenth is without veering into territory that Trump and his administration would disparage as DEI and "woke ideology"?



## Backlash after Defense Intelligence Agency bars events for MLK Day, Pride Month

07:05



At the university level, college administrators and educators across the country have expressed “[extraordinary fear](#)” of losing federal dollars if they don’t acquiesce to the Trump administration’s demands to tone down any curriculum that, [they wrongly assert](#), places a burden of guilt on white students. And while Ivy League institutions like Harvard University have the endowment backing and wealthy alumni support to better withstand the Trump administration’s threats to their budgets, historically Black colleges and universities and the students who attend them are much more vulnerable.

It’s hard to get in the spirit of Juneteenth in 2025 following last month’s news that Trump, days after telling HBCUs that they have nothing to fear from his administration, proposed a federal budget that would [cut \\$64 million from Howard University’s budget](#). Or following the news that the Trump administration ended a \$16.3 million grant to Florida A&M’s College of Pharmacy in part, the National Institutes of Health claimed in a letter, because it funded “[amorphous equity objectives](#).”

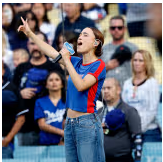
Trump’s proposed budget would also slash the federal Pell Grant program, [which 40% of undergraduate students](#) and 60% of Black undergraduate students used to pay for college in 2019-20. As for students who attend the 37 United Negro College Fund HBCUs, [73% received Pell Grants](#). Reducing funding for Pell Grants, then, is a way of making sure that fewer Black people can access the freedom that can accompany higher education.

# For all the things I didn't learn, I can't say that the president of the United States was actively working for me not to learn them.

There was a lot of history I wasn't taught and should have been taught during my K-12 years. The horrors of chattel slavery were glossed over, and enslavement was presented as merely a period of unpaid labor that Abraham Lincoln ended. I wasn't taught that Rosa Parks' refusal to move to another seat on a Montgomery bus was not a singular act of defiance but the culmination of years of preparation and advocacy. Nor was I taught that Martin Luther King Jr., who led the bus boycott in that city, modeled it after a successful bus boycott in my hometown, Baton Rouge. I wasn't taught about the radical King who opposed the Vietnam War and, when he was assassinated, was planning a Poor People's Campaign. I wasn't taught about the 1921 Tulsa race riots or the 1985 MOVE bombing in Philadelphia. And I didn't even know who James Baldwin was.

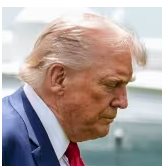
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But for all the things I didn't learn about Black history, women's history, queer history, I can't say that the president of the United States was actively working for me not to learn them.

## 'Symone' Exclusive: The Journey to Juneteenth Part One

07:31



That's what makes Trump's anti-DEI push such an attack: the intention.

When I think about how our ancestors would just have assumed their bondage was still intact had they not learned of their freedom on June 19, 1865, I can't help but think about how the toll of miseducation can be a modern form of captivity for a people deprived of the fullness of their story.

And how oppressive it is for the White House to work to ensure that their knowledge of self remains hidden.

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Donney Rose

Baton Rouge, Louisiana, native Donney Rose is a New Orleans-based poet, advocacy journalist and teaching artist. He is a past [Kennedy Center Citizen Artist Fellow](#) and a recipient of the 2022 Maryland State Arts Council Independent Artist Award for Literary Arts, among countless other noteworthy accomplishments in arts and community organizing.

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